

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 22, 2020

The Honorable Eric S. Dreiband
Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Assistant Attorney General Dreiband:

We write to ask that the U.S. Department of Justice take immediate action on yet another shooting of an unarmed black person in the United States. Breonna Taylor was a 26-year-old EMT who worked for two hospitals in Louisville, Kentucky. On March 13, police officers with the Louisville Police Department SWAT team entered Ms. Taylor's apartment to execute a drug search warrant, and allegedly fired 20 shots into her apartment. Ms. Taylor was shot at least eight times. She was not a primary suspect, nor were there any drugs recovered from her home. The killing of Ms. Taylor is an unspeakable tragedy that requires immediate answers and accountability. Accordingly, we ask that the U.S. Department of Justice immediately launch an independent investigation into the shooting of Breonna Taylor, as well as a pattern or practice investigation into the Louisville Police Department for potential civil rights violations.

One day after Ms. Taylor's death, the Louisville Police Department announced that they were opening an internal investigation into the shooting and had placed the three involved officers on administrative leave. In the last two months, those officers have not been discharged by the department or charged by the district attorney's office. On May 20, Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer announced that the Louisville Police Department sent the investigative file to Kentucky Attorney General Daniel Cameron, and will send the file to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Attorney for the Western District of Kentucky.

The Louisville Police Department was accused of using excessive force before Ms. Taylor was killed. Two of the three officers involved in Ms. Taylor's death have been the subject of excessive force complaints.¹ Moreover, the Louisville Police Department SWAT team was involved in another drug raid last October where, after minimal investigation, they entered the home of a black family and held them at gunpoint.² The family alleges that the targets of the investigation did not live at the home, and this could easily have been discovered by police prior to their execution of the warrant. In light of the troubling parallels between these cases, we ask the Justice Department to conduct an independent investigation to determine whether the Louisville Police Department has engaged in a pattern or practice of constitutional violations.

¹ Darcy Costello and Tessa Duvall, "Get your damn story straight": What we know about Louisville woman Breonna Taylor's Death, USA TODAY (May 14, 2020), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/14/breonna-taylor-what-know-louisville-emt-killed-police/5189743002/>.

² See, e.g., Jason Riley, *Lawsuit: Louisville family held at gunpoint after SWAT team errs in marijuana raid*, WDRB (Oct. 29, 2019), https://www.wdrb.com/in-depth/lawsuit-louisville-family-held-at-gunpoint-after-swat-team-errs/article_7ab3983c-fa67-11e9-85fd-4b5d61f667e6.html.

Ms. Taylor was a young woman with plans for a long, fruitful life. Her mother has said that Ms. Taylor had planned to become a nurse, buy a home, and one day start a family. Instead, her life was brutally cut short by a haphazard law enforcement exercise. Ms. Taylor worked to save lives during the COVID-19 pandemic; it is time for the U.S. Department of Justice to honor hers. Accordingly, we ask that the U.S. Department of Justice immediately launch an independent investigation into whether Ms. Taylor's killing violated federal laws. We also ask the Department of Justice to conduct an independent investigation to determine whether there has been a pattern or practice of constitutional violations at the Louisville Police Department.

Sincerely,



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



Lucy McBath
United States Representative

Signatories

U.S. Senators

Richard Blumenthal
Cory A. Booker
Sherrod Brown
Kirsten Gillibrand
Amy Klobuchar
Edward J. Markey
Patty Murray
Bernard Sanders
Chris Van Hollen
Elizabeth Warren

U.S. Representatives

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Kathy Castor
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Yvette D. Clarke
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